Bag of Bones

A Miscellany on the Body

compiled by

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"Bhikkhus, they do not savor the deathless who do not savor mindfulness of the body; they savor the deathless who savor mindfulness of the body."

—A i 45

"A skeleton wrapped up in skin…"

—M 82

Abbreviations

M.	Majjhima-nikāya
A.	Aṅguttara-nikāya
S.	Saṃyutta-nikāya
M.R.	Minor Readings (and Illustrator)—Khuddaka-pathā

Introduction

THE body is thought to be most obviously "me," what I regard as the most tangible part of myself. Around it therefore are constructed many views, all of them distorted to some extent, which prevent insight arising into *the body as it really is*. This book is a small anthology relating to the body in various ways, and presents material which, if contemplated by the earnest and sincere student of Dhamma, will eventually provide fruitful insight and, thereby, freedom from the many desires and fears centered on the body.

Such desires for pleasures in which the body is the instrument (though it is in the heart-mind where they dwell), awaken and intensify greed of all kinds, for food or sex for instance. Greed which is often accompanied by pleasurable sensations—and therefore desired—needs a rather bitter medicine to combat it: hence the number of pieces here on the unattractiveness of the body, its decay and death—all unpleasant matters. Some of the material, concerned with bodily unattractiveness, is like a medicine which need only be taken while the disease of greed-lust is active, and afterwards may be discontinued. It is important to understand this, and not to form the mistaken impression that the Buddha advocated viewing all beauty as loathsome. It is only that there is a hook in beauty which tangles with the greed in one's own heart and leads to more and more complications and difficulties.

Fears center around aging-decay, disease and death. They are not overcome by pretending they do not exist, as the ostrich is said to bury its head in the sand at the approach of enemies. Only resolutely facing these inevitable features of life can bring insight and relief from fear.

The Buddha's instructions on contemplation of the body are addressed to those who are able, through their life-style, to practice them. This means in effect monks and nuns, together with dedicated lay people. The former group have this contemplation given to them by their Teachers at the time of Going-forth from home to homelessness, and they need such a medicine to combat lust, which is destructive to the celibate Holy Life. Lay people keeping the Five Precepts have contentment with their partners as an important part of their practice. Sex is a natural part of their life but should still be restrained and kept within the bounds of the Third Precept. If not, how much trouble follows! But some of them may wish to live without sexual attachment, and this cannot be done in the way of Dhamma by ignoring the power of the sexual drive, or by suppressing it. Only when it is treated with mindfulness can it be transcended. The aspect of mindfulness which is needed for this is the subject, or rather the interrelated subjects of this book.

In the world today people are subjected to a bombardment of sensuality by way of the mass media. Sex especially is used as a bait to sell things, and as a titillation of sensory experience. When this subjection is continued, the defilements of the mind, notably lust, greed, and attachment, are sure to be strengthened. Then when this has happened the result is not more happiness, only an increase of dukkha, suffering, trouble, and difficulties. The medicine for such over-indulgence and over-stimulation is given in this book.

It is said that this subject of meditation is unique to the Buddha's Teachings and that elsewhere it is not clearly taught. This is not surprising as we find that desire is sometimes accepted as being "natural." Wherever desires are viewed as "natural," that is, inherent in one's nature or self, nothing much can be done about them. But the Buddha analyzed desires into those which are wholesome—to practice Dhamma, for instance—and the unwholesome ones, among which are greed and lust. They may not be gross either, as in the case of the meditator who is greedy for bliss, or visions, and attached to such things. The Buddha has provided the

medicine for all unwholesome desires, and according to our various ways of life we can use it to effect partial or complete cures.

When the emphasis is so much on sensuality, youth, and beauty as we find now, the darker sides of life get pushed away and attempts are made, always unsuccessful, to sweep them under the carpet. Those who try to do so will not be pleased with the exercises contained in the Buddha's contemplation of the body. Such things will appear to them as morbid and unnatural. Yet they are also a part of this life and should not be ignored. And if the effort is made to ignore what is unpleasant about the body, sooner or later one will be jolted into the recognition of these things. Such jolts are not pleasant. Rather than leave it until one is forced to know the body's unpleasant sides it is better to acquaint one's emotions with this knowledge gradually.

In this spirit, *Bag of Bones* is being published. Unfortunately, being only a book it cannot give person-to-person advice on special problems. It can only offer some general guidelines to people who are interested in reducing their greed and lust. *A word of warning:* meditation on the unattractiveness of the body can be very potent and should only be practiced with moderation and care, especially if one has no personal contact with a Teacher of Buddhist meditation. If fear and anxiety, or other extreme unwholesome emotional states arise after practice of it, then it will be better to lay it down and take up Loving-kindness *(mettā)* or Recollection of the Buddha *(Buddhanussati)* as one's meditation instead.

This book, therefore, is not so much for beginners in Buddhism but rather for those who have already practiced for some time. May it inspire many people to practice the Dhamma more intently!

Translations which have no one’s name after them are by the compiler. And all other reflections, dialogues, and poems too are his work, and have been jotted down as they occurred to him, mostly in the peaceful Forest Hermitage of Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathera outside Kandy. May I also here acknowledge the venerable Mahathera’s kind advice and help in bringing this collection to print.

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Bag of Bones

1

> "Bhikkhus, when *one dhamma* is developed and cultivated it leads to a great sense of urgency, to great benefit, to great safety from bondage, to great mindfulness and full awareness, to obtainment of knowledge and insight, to a pleasant abiding here and now, to realization of the fruit of true knowledge and deliverance. What is that *one dhamma?* It is mindfulness occupied with the body."
>
> —A. I. 43, trans. Ven. Ñāṇamoli

2 ~ The Advantages of Mindfulness of the Body

1. One conquers aversion and delight,
2. And fear and dread as well.
3. Besides, one can stand cold and heat, hunger and thirst, troublesome things in the world, harsh words and painful feelings.
4. One obtains all four jhānas,
5. And supernormal faculties,
6. The heavenly ear element (clairaudience),
7. Knowledge of others' minds,
8. And of all one's past lives,
9. And sees besides, how beings appear and pass away according to their kamma.
10. Finally one enters upon the two deliverances (of the heart and by wisdom), and all taints (*āsava*) are abolished.

—M. 119, Mindfulness of the Body

3

"When anyone has developed and repeatedly practiced mindfulness of the body, he has included whatever wholesome dhammas (mental states) there are that partake of true knowledge (*vijjā*).

"Just as anyone who extends his mind over the great ocean has included whatever streams there are that flow into the ocean, so too, when anyone has developed and repeatedly practiced mindfulness of the body, he has included whatever wholesome dhammas there are that partake of true knowledge."

—M. 119, trans. Ven. Ñāṇamoli (revised)

4 ~ Insight Knowledge

"This my body consists of the four great elements, is procreated by a mother and father, is built up out of boiled rice and bread, is of the nature of impermanence, of being worn and rubbed away, of dissolution and disintegration, and this my consciousness has that for its support and is bound up with it."

—M. 77, trans. Ven. Ñanamoli

5

"Now this body that has material form consists of the four great elements, it is procreated by a mother and father, and built up out of boiled rice and bread, it has the nature of impermanence, of being worn and rubbed away, of dissolution and disintegration. It must be regarded—

> as impermanent—as (liable to) suffering,
> as a disease—as a cancer,
> as a dart—as a calamity,
> as an affliction—as alien,
> as a falling to pieces—as void,
> as without a self.

"When a man regards it thus, he abandons his desire for the body, affection for the body, and his habit of treating the body as a basis for his inferences."[1]

—M. 74, trans. Ven. Ñanamoli

6

You live by *"following the body"?* Eating when it's hungry, resting when it's tired, dressing when necessary, urinating, defecating, going to work to get money—all for what? For this body? Then what about the time when its end comes? What was it all for?

7

How much time do you spend on your body—
to feed it—to clothe it,
to cleanse it—to wash it,
to beautify it—to relax it,
to rest it?

How much time do you spend on your mind?

8

Three things we never forget to do for the *body:*
wash it,
feed it,
medicate it.

Three things we usually forget to do with the *mind:*
wash it (with the purity of calm meditation),
feed it (with good Dhamma),
medicate it (mindfully ridding ourselves of the diseases of greed, aversion and delusion, with the supreme medicine of Dhamma).

The mind gets dirty and needs washing, it becomes hungry and needs nutriment, and it is most of the time diseased and needs curing.

Why are we so forgetful of our own good?

9 ~ Gratification and Danger in Form (Body)

“And what is gratification in the case of form (body)?

“Suppose there were a girl of warrior-noble cast or brahmin caste or householder stock, in her fifteenth or sixteenth year, neither too tall nor too short, neither too thin nor too fat, neither too dark nor too fair: is her beauty and loveliness then at its height?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“Now the pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on that beauty and loveliness are the gratification in the case of form.

“And what is danger in the case of form?

“Later on one might see that same woman here at eighty, ninety or a hundred years, aged, as crooked as a roof, doubled up, tottering with the aid of sticks, frail, her youth gone, her teeth broken, grey haired, scanty-haired, bald, wrinkled, with limbs all blotchy: how do you conceive this, bhikkhus, has her former beauty and loveliness vanished and the danger become evident?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“Bhikkhus, this is the danger in the case of form.”

—M. 13, “The Mass of Suffering,” trans. Ven. Ñanamoli

N.B. Women reading this should change the sex of the person in the above.

10 ~ Reflections on her body by the former beautiful courtesan, later the arahat nun Ambapāli

Black was my hair, the color of bees, curled at the ends;
with aging it's likened to fibers of hemp—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's[2] words.

Fragrant was my hair, full of flowers like a perfume box;
with aging it possesses the smell of dog's fur—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Thick as a well-planted grove and comely with comb, pin and parting;
with aging it's thin here and there—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Braided well, adorned, black masses beautified by gold;
with aging has the head become quite bald—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

My eyebrows then as though by artists were well-drawn;
with aging they are wrinkled, hanging down—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Flashing and brilliant as jewels, black and long were my eyes;
by aging overwhelmed no longer beautiful—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Long, beautiful and delicate my nose in the bloom of my youth;
with aging has become quite pendulous—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Fair my earlobes, formerly as bracelets well and truly crafted;
with aging they are wrinkled, hanging down—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Then were my teeth beautiful, the hue of plantain buds;
with aging they have broken and yellowed—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Sweet was my singing voice as cuckoo in the forest grove;
with aging it is broken now and then—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Formerly my throat was beautiful, polished like a conch;
with aging decayed it is and twisted—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Round as door-bars then were my arms beautiful;
with aging they are weak as the trumpet-creeper—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Adorned with gold and delicate signet rings my hands were beautiful;
with aging just like knotted and twisted roots—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Full and round were my breasts, close together, lovely and lofty;
pendulous they hang now as water-skins without water—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Fair was my body then as a well-burnished tablet of gold;
now it is covered all over with very fine wrinkles—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Lovely both my thighs as the trunks of elephants;
with aging they are as a bamboo's stems—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

Fair were my legs adorned with fine golden anklets;
with aging stick-like as the sesame—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

As though filled out with down my feet so lovely;
with aging they are cracked and wrinkled—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

So was this congeries; decrepit now, abode of dukkha;
old house with its plaster falling off—
not other than this are the Truth-speaker's words.

—Verses of the Elder Bhikkhunis 252-270

11

"Come, bhikkhus, abide contemplating ugliness in the body, perceiving repulsiveness in nutriment, perceiving disenchantment with all the world, contemplating impermanence in all formations."

—M. 50, trans. Ven. Ñanamoli

Directly counter goes this to the world's way which is: to see beauty in the body or at any rate disguise the ugliness, to delight in food both physical and mental, to be enchanted with (the beauty of) the world (and forget the other side), and to regard mental formations as a basis for a permanent self or soul.

12

Rohitassa, a deva: "Lord, the world's end where one is neither born nor ages nor dies, nor passes away nor reappears: is it possible to know or see or reach that by traveling there?"

The Buddha: "Friend, that there is a world's end where one is neither born nor ages nor dies, nor passes away nor reappears, which is to be known or seen or reached by traveling there—that I do not say. Yet I do not say that there is ending of suffering without reaching the world's end. Rather it is in this fathom-long carcass with its perceptions and its mind that I describe the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to the cessation of the world."

—S. II. 36, A. IV. 46, trans, Ven. Ñāṇamoli

13

The current rash of so much porn has the effects we see, increased and open expression of greed and lust. The meditation techniques which can cure these diseases are all the different aspects of mindfulness concerned with the body—for they cut the body down to size, without harming it, while emphasizing the importance of the mind.

14

Contemplation of the body's unattractiveness is not a popular meditation. People are happy to try to rid themselves of anger and hatred because they are painful. This can be done by the well-known meditations developing loving-kindness (*mettā*). But meditating upon the nature of this body dulls the appetites rooted in greed—and greed is often associated with pleasure. And isn't pleasure what this life's all about?

Safely bagged by Māra—Death and Lord of the sensual realm!

15

When the body is not washed it attracts flies and vermin which feed on it. When the mind is not purified but is full of lust, hate and delusion what does it attract…?

16

The body is so near, yet like an unexplored continent. Large areas in it are a blank. While this is so, greed, lust and craving dwell safely in the jungles of ignorance.

17

People's attitudes to the body are liable to swing from the extreme of indulging the desires connected with the body, to the other extreme of mortifying it.

The Middle Way of mindfulness regarding the body is unknown to them.

18

When desires connected with bodily pleasures can be indulged, which means that *greed* rules the mind, *aversion* only arises if one's aims are thwarted; but when a person has undertaken some method of self-discipline not guided by wisdom (*paññā*), then suppressed desires find their outlet not only by aversion but also by bodily mortification. As though the body was responsible! So, having no wisdom, people subject their bodies to "disciplines" and rigors of various kinds in order, they think, *to control strong desires.* Then *aversion*, that is self-hatred in a more or less subtle form, reigns supreme and sufferings are increased. Desires can never be understood in this way, only suppressed. The only way to understand desires is through mindfulness, and the various exercises on mindfulness of the body are for this purpose.

19

There are very few beings who do not suffer from lust, in this world of sensuality at any rate. It is a great sickness of the mind, an epidemic with no beginning, and no end in sight for most beings. Wise men want to be cured of this disease and the Buddha offers for this the medicine of contemplating the unattractive in one's own body. One should not try to see the ugly or foul in others. This could turn to hatred—even if not, it could result in a "sour grapes" attitude to them. Towards others maintain one of the Divine Abidings: loving-kindness, compassion, joy-with-others, or equanimity, but towards one's own selfish desires for pleasure develop the seeing of unattractiveness.

20

True love, which is cool, unattached *mettā*, and compassion for others' sorrows, do not grow when people are bound up with greed and sensuality.

21

When lust arises in the mind, which leads to more defilements, more burning desires in future, just take a look at this butcher's shop of a body. Anything attractive about red meat? Are white bones specially lovable? Or coiled "innards" desirable? Lust soon disappears when the body is regarded in this way. Repeating this practice, lust becomes weaker and arises less often.

22

"…no one who searches earnestly throughout the whole of this fathom-long carcass, starting from the soles of the feet upwards, starting from the top of the hair downwards, and starting from the skin all round, ever sees even the minutest atom of pureness in it such as a pearl or a crystal or a beryl or aloes or sandalwood or saffron or camphor or talcum powder, etc; on the contrary, he sees nothing but various very malodorous offensive drab-looking sorts of impurity consisting of head-hair, body-hairs, and the rest."

—M.R., iii, 4, trans. Ven. Ñāṇamoli

23 ~ The Thirty-two Parts of the Body

The practice of this mindfulness attending to the body can begin by reciting this passage:

> "In this very body, from the soles of the feet up, from the crown of the head down, surrounded by skin, full of these various mean impurities, he reviews thus:
>
> "There are in this body:

Kesā	head-hair
Lomā	body-hair
Nakhā	nails
Dantā	teeth
Taco	skin
Maṃsaṃ	flesh
Nahāru	sinews
Aṭṭhi	bones
Aṭṭhimiñjaṃ	bone-marrow
Vakkaṃ	kidneys
Hadayaṃ	heart
Yakanaṃ	liver
Kilomakaṃ	membranes
Pihakaṃ	spleen
Papphāsaṃ	lungs
Antaṃ	large gut
Antagunaṃ	small gut
Udariyaṃ	gorge
Karīsaṃ	dung
Pittaṃ	bile
Semhaṃ	phlegm
Pubbo	pus
Lohitaṃ	blood
Sedo	sweat
Medo	fat
Assu	tears
Vasā	grease
Khelo	spit
Siṅghānikā	snot
Lasikā	oil of the joints
Muttaṃ	urine."

(to which is added "brain in the skull" to make up 32 parts).

"In this very body, from the soles of the feet up, from the crown of the head down, surrounded by skin, full of these various mean impurities, he reviews thus."

—M. 10, Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, trans. Ven. Ñanamoli

24

There is no unhealthy self-disgust or aversion here, just seeing what is unattractive as it really is. But in later times some teachers (such as Shāntideva in his Bodhicaryāvatāra)[3] went to extremes in this matter. One must suspect in such a case not the proper dispassion with the body but rather perverted passion. Lust can switch to aversion and hatred quickly.

25

It is a remarkable thing that the first five parts on this list—the "person" we see—are all dead! Hair of the head and body lives only at its roots, we see dead hair. Nails that we see are dead nails, the quick is painful and hidden. The teeth, all that is visible, are dead, and their tender living roots we only experience painfully from time to time. Outer skin is dead—horrible if it was not, for it is sensitive enough already. The living skin below is more painful.

So when we get excited about a visual form—someone else's body—we are stimulated by impressions of what has died already. Strange to be excited by what is dead on the outside and dying within! However, the real lure is in our own minds: the thoughts of lust that arise there and embellish the corpse before us.

Apart from this, live bodies and dead ones differ only in degree. Lust fastens only on the body. But loving-kindness and compassion are concerned with the well-being of peoples' minds and bodies.

26

When we see a "person," we see just the first five of the 32 parts: head-hair, body-hair, nail, teeth and skin. When *head-hair* is of certain colors and forms, *body-hair* present or absent according to sex and race, *nails* cut and cleaned, *teeth* white, polished and with none missing, and *skin*, well washed and unblemished by scars or wrinkles and covering flesh of certain shapes—then with all these conditions fulfilled, desire arises!

What about grey or white hair on the head or body—thin and straggly, nails cracked, dirty and broken, teeth yellow or mostly missing and skin wrinkled and blotchy? Who gets excited?

27

Staring at corpses as recommended by commentary-writer Buddhaghosa in his *Path of Purification* is not really to the point. One has *inwardly* to stare at *this* corpse to accomplish anything.

And he gets much too complicated in his descriptions of how to do the actual practice, which does not require a lot of categories and analysis, or things to be learnt by heart. This applies to both the meditation of corpses and to the 32 parts of the body.

In the latter case, just a few parts are needed for repetition and inspection, and even one will be sufficient if one's mind wanders. Simplicity and directness cut out the clutter of thoughts—and clearing those out is the way to get into meditation.

28 ~ Meditation On Bones

"Bones in a pattern ordered
Standing end to end
With many joints, whose shaping
On no one does depend;
By sinews held together,
Menaced by aging's threat,
Incognizant, resembling
A wooden marionette."

—M. R., iii 22

29 ~ Contemplation of the Body: Charnel Ground Meditations

"Again, a bhikkhu judges this same body as though he were looking at bodily remains thrown on a charnel ground, bones without sinews scattered in all directions: here a hand bone, there a foot bone, there a shin bone, there a thigh bone, there a hip bone, there a back bone, there a rib bone, there a breast bone, there an arm bone, there a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, there a jaw bone, there a tooth bone, there the skull.

"This body too is of such a nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that!

"In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body in himself, or he abides contemplating the body as a body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body in himself and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in the body its arising factors, or he abides contemplating in the body its vanishing factors, or he abides contemplating in the body its arising and vanishing factors.

"Or else, mindfulness that 'There is a body' is simply established in him to the extent of bare knowledge and remembrance (of it), while he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world."

—from M. 10, trans. Ven. Ñanamoli

30

When the mind is calm, look into this bony frame to see its emptiness, how the wind blows through it. Who owns these bones?

31

It seems that as the Elder (Mahā-tissa) was on his way from Cetiyapabbata to Anurādhapura for alms, a certain daughter-in-law of a clan, who had quarreled with her husband and had set out early from Anurādhapura all dressed up and tricked out like a celestial nymph to go to her relatives' home, saw him on the road, and being low-minded, she laughed a loud laugh. (Wondering) "What is that?", the Elder looked up and finding in the bones of her teeth the perception of foulness, he attained arahatship. But her husband who was going after her saw the Elder and asked "Venerable sir, did you by any chance see a woman?" The Elder told him:

> "Whether it was a man or a woman
> That went by I noticed not;
> But only that on this high road
> There goes a group of bones."

—*The Path of Purification*, I, 55

32

A mound of about five feet high of bones, skulls, long bones and vertebrae all mixed up. No knowing where one person's bones ended and another's began. Over them all the hot sun beat down and bleached them, the rains lashed down and washed them; these remains of unknown poor people waiting to be cremated in a Chinese graveyard in Bangkok. A rare and stirring sight in these days of "window-dressing."

33

Suppose, that during meditation, this bony frame appeared to one’s mind’s eye but when one opened the eyes at the meditation’s end, the bones of the hand, or other parts, were still visible without their covering of “decent” flesh—how upsetting for oneself—and others if they too could see it. How very odd to be so fearful of a part of one’s “own” body!

34 ~ Story

Once there was a man who had charge of a hothouse in which a great variety of tropical water-lilies and gourds were growing. On this particular afternoon it was cold and raining outside, so that a continuous stream of visitors entered to warm themselves and admire the exotic plants. Having sprayed the plants over with water from a hose the man bent down to turn off the tap. When he raised his eyes he saw, not people, but a procession of skeletons. The vision lasted a moment and was gone. An indication of what sort of meditation he should practice, perhaps?

35

“Bhikkhus, the bones of a single person journeying on, wandering on for an eon, would make a cairn, a pile, a mound as great as Mount Vepulla, were there a collector of those bones and if the collection were not destroyed.”

—Itivuttaka 17

36

"Just as when a space is enclosed by timber and creepers, grass and clay, there comes to be the term 'house,' so too, when a space is enclosed by bones and sinews, flesh and skin, there comes to be the term 'form'."

—M. 28, para 36, trans. Ven. Ñāṇamoli

37

Or again, the Ancient Teachers said:

"Nine hundred sinews all round
In this fathom-long carcass found
Whereby its bony frame is bound
As creepers serve a building to compound."

—M. R. again

38

Or how about this for the body?

"A tumor where nine holes abide[4]
Wrapped in a coat of clammy hide
And trickling filth on every side,
Polluting the air with stenches far and wide."

—M. R., quoting "Questions of Milinda" 74

39 ~ An Ulcer

Monks, it is just like an ulcer that had been growing for many years, having nine gaping wounds, nine lesions, and whatever discharged and oozed out of it would be foul and stinking, it would be loathsome.

"Ulcer," monks, is a name for this body consisting of the four great elements, procreated by mother and father, and built up out of rice and bread. It is subject to impermanence, to breaking up and wearing away, to dissolution and to disintegration, having nine gaping wounds, nine lesions. Whatever discharges and oozes out of it is foul and stinks, it is loathsome.

Therefore, monks, turn away from[5] this body.

—A. IX, 15

40

"A man's body is structurally simply a hollow ring. A hollow ring elongated into a hollow cylinder, with the inner portion further lengthened and coiled; and above the upper orifice there bulges a head and between the upper and lower orifices the limbs stick out. The world passes in small portions through the ring, helped in by spoon and gulping, and out by pressure and paper."

—A Thinker's Notebook" by Ven. Ñanamoli, 240, March '56

41 ~ Tale:

A woman, infatuated, came to a bhikkhu and stripped off her clothes. The bhikkhu, without batting an eyelid, said—

"Now take off your skin."

42

"Beauty is skin-deep"—how true this saying is. Who wants a beautiful body without skin? How fragile is skin, but how strong is lust!

43

Another view of the body:

> "A carcass daubed with bits of meat
> Nine times a hundred when complete,
> Where swarming clans of worms[6] compete
> To share the rotting midden for their seat."

44

On this subject we have also:

"*As to sharing the body with many:* This body is shared by many. Firstly, it is shared by the eighty families of worms (parasites). There too, creatures live in dependence on the outer skin, on the inner skin, on the flesh, on the sinews, on the bones, on the marrow, feeding on these things. And there they are born, grow old and die, evacuate and make water; and the body is their maternity home, their hospital, their charnel ground, their privy and their urinal. The body can also be brought to death with the upsetting of these worms. And just as it is shared with the eighty families of worms, so too it is shared by the several hundred internal diseases, as well as by such external causes of death as snakes, scorpions and what not."

—*The Path of Purification*, Chapter VII, 25

45 ~ The Discourse on Victory

(The Buddha:)

Walking or standing, sitting, lying down,
He bends it in or stretches it: this is the body's movement.
This body by bones and sinews bound, bedaubed with membrane, flesh,
And covered up with skin—is not seen as it really is.
Filled with guts, with belly filled with liver-lump and bladder,
With heart, with lungs as well, with kidneys and with spleen,
With snot and spittle, and with fat and sweat,
With blood, and oil for the joints, with bile, and grease of the skin;
Then by nine streams the unclean flows forever from it:
Eye-dirt from the eyes, ear-dirt from the ears,
Snot from the nose, now from the mouth bile is spewed,
Now is spewed out phlegm, and from the body sweat and dirt.
And then its hollow head is stuffed with brains;
The fool thinks (all is) beautiful—led on by ignorance.
But when it's lying dead, bloated up and livid blue,
Cast away in the charnel ground, even kin do not care for it.
Dogs eat it and jackals, and wolves and worms,
Crows and vultures eat it, and whatever other creatures are.
Wise the bhikkhu in this world who having heard the Buddha-word,
The body he knows surely and thoroughly, he sees it as it really is,
(Thinking): As this (living body) so that (corpse was once),
As that (corpse is now) so this (body will surely be)—
So for the body, within and without, discard desire.
Such a bhikkhu, wise, discarding desire and lust in this world,
Attains to deathlessness, to peace, Nibbāna the unchanging state.
Pampered is this foul, two-footed, fetid thing,
Though filled with various sorts of stench and oozing here and there:
He who with such a body thinks to exalt himself,
Or should despise another—what else is this but blindness?

—Sutta-Nipāta, Vijaya Sutta, Verses 193-206

46 ~ Dhammapada Verses on the Body

41.
Not long alas—and it will lie
this body here, upon the earth!
Rejected, void of consciousness
and useless as a rotten log.

46.
Having known this body likened unto foam
and understanding thoroughly its nature mirage-like,
cutting down the shafts of Māra, flower-tipped,
unseen one can go beyond the king of death.

147.
See this body beautiful,
a mass of sores, a congeries,
much considered but miserable
where nothing is stable, nothing persists.

148.
All decrepit is this body,
diseases' nest and frail;
this foul mass is broken up—
indeed life ends in death.

149.
These dove-hued bones
scattered in fall
like long white gourds,
what joy in seeing them?

150.
This city is made of bones
plastered with flesh and blood;
in it are stored decay and death
as well as pride, detraction.

151.
Even rich royal chariots decay;
this body also reaches to decay;
but the Dhamma of the good does not decay;
so the good make it known to the calm.

293.
But those who always practice well
bodily mindfulness,
do never what should not be done
and ever do what should be done;
mindful, clearly comprehending,
their pollutions out of existence go.

299.
Well awake and watchful
ever are Gotama's sāvakā,[7]
who constantly by day and night
are mindful of the body.

47 ~ Two Pairs of Verses on the Contemplation of Beauty and Unattractiveness

7.
One who lives contemplating beauty,
with faculties of sense unrestrained,
who knows not moderation in his food,
and who is indolent, of little effort;
him indeed does Māra overthrow
as wind a tree of little strength.

8.
One who lives contemplating foulness,
with faculties of sense well-restrained,
who does know moderation in his food,
and who has faith, of roused-up effort;
him indeed does Māra never overthrow
as wind does not the rocky mount.

349.
One who contemplates the beautiful,
of agitating thoughts and active lust,
craving in this person constantly increases;
that one indeed makes strong his bonds.

350.
But who delights in calming thoughts,
he develops foulness ever mindfully,
he indeed will make an end;
that one will sever Māra's bonds.

48 ~ Verses of the Arahat Kappa Thera

Full of many kinds of filth,
producer of much excrement,
as ripe as a midden-pool,
a tumor, a great wound
filled up with pus and blood,
as though sunk in a cesspit
the body oozes water
and ever filth outflows.

Tied together by sixty tendons
and plastered with plaster of flesh,
tightly jacketed with skin—
with no value, this body of filth.

A connected skeleton of bones
bound together with sinew cords
producing various postures
by conditioned things combined.

Set out with certainty of death
and near to King Mortality
but having rejected it[8] just here
a man goes as he likes.

Covered over with ignorance
and tied with the fourfold tie,
enmeshed in the net of tendencies
this body sinks in the flood.

Hitched to the five hindrances
and so, affected by thoughts,
accompanied by craving's root
and wrapped by delusion's wrappings—

this body continues on,
made to go by kamma's means,
its existence in the end destroyed,
all sorts of beings perish.

Those ordinary people, blinded fools,
thinking their bodies belong to them
fill up the fearful cemeteries
and seize repeated birth.

Those who abandon[9] this body
as one would a dung-smeared snake,
having vomited being's root,
will, taintless, Nibbāna attain.

—Verses of the Elder Bhikkhus 567-576

49 ~ Verses of the Arahat Nandaka Thera

Shame on it then, full of stinks
and oozing, Māra's partisan,[10]
in your body nine streams are
leaking out continually.

Do not conceive of these filled-up things,
they are not praised by Tathāgatas
who desire not even the heavens,
not to speak of the human world.

But those who are foolish, stupid,
ill-counseled, dullness-shrouded,
such do indeed desire it
thrown down by Māra's snare.

Those in whom desire and hate
and ignorance are discarded—
such do not desire it,
severed their ropes—unbound!

—Verses of the Elder Bhikkhus 279-282

50 ~ Verses of the Arahat Sabbakāma Thera

This foul two-footed thing,
full of many kinds of filth
flowing out from here and there,
ill-smelling—dearly loved it is.

As by a trap the wary deer,
as by the hook the fish,
just as the monkey's caught with pitch
so ordinary men are trapped.

Forms, sounds, smells and tastes
and tangibles, delighting the mind,
these are the five cords of desire
seen in a woman's form.[11]

Those who pursue them—
ordinary men with minds enflamed—
fill up the fearful cemeteries
and heap up further birth.

But one who does avoid it
as the feet a serpent's head,
mindful, such a one transcends
clinging to this world.

Seeing the danger of sensual desires,
renunciation seeing secure,
escaped from all desires[12]
to exhaustion of taints attained.

—Verses of the Elder Bhikkhus 453-458

51 ~ Verses of the Arahat Raṭṭhapāla

His family tried to snare him, with the bait of his former wives and good food, into returning to the household life, at which he said:

"Behold a puppet here pranked out,
A body built up out of sores,
Sick, and much object for concern,
Where no stability abides.

Behold a figure here pranked out
With jewelry and earrings too,
A skeleton wrapped up in skin,
Made creditable by its clothes.

Its feet adorned with henna dye
And powder smeared upon its face,
It may beguile a fool, but not
A seeker of the Further Shore.

Its hair is dressed in eightfold plaits
And unguent smeared upon its eyes.
It may beguile a fool, but not
A seeker of the Further Shore.

A filthy body decked without
Like a new-painted unguent pot,
It may beguile a fool, but not
A seeker of the Further Shore.

The deer-hunter sets well the snare
But the deer springs not the trap;
We eat the bait, and we depart,
Leaving the hunters to lament."

—M. 82, trans. Ven. Ñanamoli

52

The vast array of "beauty products," for both male and female, should make people think. If it is so necessary to beautify the body what is it really like?

53

This impure body
like a wave that rises suddenly,
breaks and disperses.

This impure body
like a speck of dust
in a desert land
where mirages are seen.

—Wijayasiri Amaratunga

54

The body is like a leaky barrel, oozing all the time. But a barrel can be bunged up, while the body must continue oozing its whole life.

55

A drum has four characteristics—it is round in section, covered by hide, is beaten frequently, and emits sound. In the same way the body has four characteristics: it is round in section or fairly much so, it also is covered by hide, it is beaten by the many sorts of physical and mental dukkha, and emits sound—that is, the sounds indicating pleasure which is unreliable and impermanent, and those which accompany sufferings such as weeping and lamentation. And who is the beater? His name is *Craving*.

56

The Buddha said:

"Birth is dukkha,[13] disease is dukkha, decay is dukkha, death is dukkha"—all this is dukkha related to this body. It is interesting that each sort of dukkha has special institutions in Western society to screen it off from the generality of people, who are "in between" these events so to speak. Birth takes place in maternity wards and nursing homes. Other parts of the same hospital take care of "disease." For "decay" we have old peoples' homes and the geriatric wards, while "death" may occur in all such places, the corpse then going on to the undertakers' chapels, and to religious rites. Things hidden away are unhealthy. Look at the dukkha! Look at it!

57

When one considers how many things afflict this body, it is a wonder that it keeps going so well and for so long!

Many, many kinds of dukkha!

58

There is so much dukkha connected with this body, which people never notice due to shifting around from one position to another. When tired of walking or standing, they sit down; when tired of sitting, they stand or lie down; when they have enough of lying down, they get up. Walking an unexpectedly long distance is dukkha. Standing long in queue is dukkha. Sitting in even a comfortable chair for hours is dukkha. Lying in a hospital bed for days or weeks is dukkha. By changing position we evade the dukkha, or make it less obvious. But when someone starts to meditate, spending hours on walking meditation, hours on sitting meditation—then this bodily dukkha can be felt and investigated.

59 ~ Pain and the Body

"The uninstructed ordinary person, bhikkhu, has a saying: 'There is a bottomless abyss in the great ocean.' But the uninstructed ordinary person speaks of what does not exist, of what cannot be found, that is that there is a bottomless abyss in the great ocean. A designation for painful bodily feeling, bhikkhus, is this term 'bottomless abyss.' When an uninstructed ordinary person experiences painful bodily feeling, he grieves, is afflicted laments, beats his breast, cries out loud, and becomes distraught. So it is said, bhikkhus, the uninstructed ordinary person has not emerged from the bottomless abyss, has not obtained a firm foothold.

"But, bhikkhus, when an instructed Noble Disciple experiences painful bodily feeling he does not grieve, is not afflicted, does not lament, nor beat his breast, nor cry out loud, nor become distraught. So it is said, bhikkhus, the instructed Noble Disciple has emerged from the bottomless abyss and has obtained a firm foothold."

—S. XXXVI, 4, trans. Ven. Nyanaponika

60 ~ This "form" (=body)

"Why does one say 'form' *(rūpa)?* It is deformed (*ruppati*), that is why it is called 'form.' Deformed by what? By cold and heat and hunger and thirst, by contact with mosquitoes, flies, wind, sunburn, and creeping things."

—S. XII, 79, trans. Ven. Ñāṇamoli

61

One could play similar word games in English: Why is it called a *body?* Because it is one's *abode,* therefore it is a *body*; or again because it *bodes no good*, therefore it is a *body*—though this is rather pessimistic perhaps. To balance up one could etymologize thus: It is called a *body* since depending on it *bodhi* is discovered.

62 ~ The Body's Needs as the Buddha Summarized Them

Clothing to cover it,
food to sustain it,
shelter to keep it from harm,
and medicine to cure it.

Buddhist monks recollect these four "supports" every day.

A way of cutting down greed:

Few and simple clothes cover it,
enough wholesome food sustains it,
a small shelter keeps it from harm,
and appropriate medicine cures it.

How many sets of clothes can you wear at once?
How many different dishes do you need to eat?
How much room does this body fill?
How may pills and powders to keep in health?

63 ~ Greed and the Body

Look at it like this:

There's a wardrobe with lots of clothes to cover your body. Are they all needed? (There are some clothes-less poor in this world.)

There is a pantry (a refrigerator and a freezer?), stacked with food. Is all that variety and quantity needed? (There are people starving in this world.)

There's the house one lives in with its furnishings. Is it too large or too luxurious? (There are house-less people in this world.)

There's that medicine chest of pills and creams and whatnot. Can you use them all? Are they all needed? (How many people have no medicine in this world?)

64 ~ Overeating? Gluttony?

Then read these verses:

The food and drink so greatly prized—
The crisp to chew, the soft to suck—
Go in all by a single door,
But by nine doors[14] come oozing out.

The food and drink so greatly prized—
The crisp to chew, the soft to suck—
Men like to eat in company,
But to excrete in secrecy.

The food and drink so greatly prized—
The crisp to chew, the soft to suck—
These a man eats with high delight,
And then excretes in dumb disgust.

The food and drink so greatly prized—
The crisp to chew, the soft to suck—
A single night will be enough
To bring them to putridity.

—*The Path of Purification*, Ch. XI, para. 23

(Remember while eating!)

65 ~ Reflections on a Loo

Earth and water elements inside
press to get out,
all that solid food, and drink
ingested, must be in time extruded.

No polished "sanitary ware"
adorns my forest loo
all natural
a wooden platform raised upon a pit.

Where I walk up and down
pacing steadily to still the mad mind,
at the end surrounded by trees—
my lovely loo.

Trees with asbestos sheeting broken up
nailed to the trunks—for privacy,
where only trees can watch
bored—but nourished—by this necessity.

To climb up to my toilet
six feet up swaying with the trunks
of trees, two logs are driven in the ground
as steps up to the throne.

A platform with a hole
through which one can look down
ten feet to the papered pit below
and watch the great black dung-
beetles at work burying the mess,
hygienic from our point of view
but what a birth to get,
perhaps for perverters and pornographers?

Anyway, I squat lordly far above
while water and earth elements within
join water and earth elements without.
when within I call them "mine";

when in the pit they're not me—
where does the change take place?
Strange mind which loves this stinking form
But loathes the stink down there.

Rejoicing in fine flavors,
Detesting stench and excrement:
"I" am made up of all this
rejoicing and detesting.

—'Pansā' (Vassa, the Rains) 2515/1972

66

Food arranged nicely on plates is attractive to the eyes and nose. “It looks good!”—“It smells goods!”—people say. When it reaches the mouth it is attractive to the tongue and touch. They say “How good it tastes!” or “Real crunchy!” (crackly, creamy, or whatever). But just spit it out—attractive to the eyes now or not? Greed can only arise if conditions are right for it. And how attractive is the same food spewed up after a few hours in the belly? It becomes even less desirable when after a day or two its remains are expelled. Three stages for contemplation!

67

As the meditator finds out, without food the body becomes weak, with much food it is heavy and disturbed: two kinds of dukkha. The only way is to know moderation in food, neither altogether abstaining, which can easily become the extreme of self-mortification; nor overeating, which is just the other extreme of sensual pleasure.

68 ~ Remind Yourself:

"This requisite that accrued to me—
it's just mere various elements,
that is, these clothes
and the person using them—
just elements,
not a person,
not a being,
just void.

"This requisite that accrued to me—
it's just mere various elements,
that is, this food
and the person using it—
just elements,
not a person,
not a being,
just void.

"This requisite that accrued to me—
it's just mere various elements,
that is, this shelter
and the person using it—
just elements,
not a person,
not a being,
just void.

"This requisite that accrued to me—
it's just mere various elements,
that is, this medicine
and the person using it—
just elements,
not a person,
not a being,
just void."

—Translated from a traditional Pāli recollection,
"Yathā paccayaṃ…"

69 ~ A Fleck of Foam

At one time the Lord was staying at Ayojjhaya on the bank of the river Ganges. There the Lord addressed the bhikkhus as follows: "Suppose, bhikkhus, a large fleck of foam were floating on this river Ganges and a clear-sighted man were to see it, observe it and properly examine it. Having done this it would appear to him to be empty, insubstantial, without essence—for what essence could there be in a fleck of foam?

"In the same way, bhikkhus, whatever body, past, future, or present, in oneself or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, that a bhikkhu sees, observes and properly examines… It would appear to him to be empty, insubstantial, without essence—for what essence could there be in a body?…"

The Kinsman of the Sun made clear:
Form compared to a fleck of foam,
Feeling to a bubble compared,[15]
And perception to a mirage,
Thoughts compared to a plantain-tree[16]
And consciousness to a magical trick.

—from S. XXII, 95

70

"My" body, but mosquitoes like to suck its blood.
"My" body, but fleas and bugs find on it a feeding place.
"My" body, nits and lice enjoy it too.
"My" body, which makes a cattle-tick a meal.
"My" body, where worms live happily.
"My" body, attacked by microscopic foes.
"My" body, sure it gets sick without permission.
"My" body, which is not well though I want it so.
"My" body, getting old from day to day.
"My" body, though I want youth, ever ages.
"My" body, goes and dies against my cries.
"My" body, buried or burned to elements turned.
"My" body—how come?
"My"? Who's the owner here?

71 ~ A Rationalist and a Buddhist

B. Whose is that body?

R. It's mine, of course!

B. Better be careful with that "of course." Anyway, how do you know it's your body?

R. Well, I see it—every day for years.

B. So it's yours because you see it?

R. Yes. Besides, I feel it's mine.

B. O.K. So that's another reason why it belongs to you. You feel it—right?

R. Sure! It feels like me.

B. Any other evidence that it's yours? What about the other senses?

R. I suppose you could say that I hear it too. My guts gurgle and my feet thump the deck. Of course it smells like me too. Taste? Oh I don't think that helps identify it very much. So that's all the senses, and they tell me that it is mine.

B. You've left out the most important sense—the mind. That tells you "this is my body" all the time…

R. Yes, if you want to call mind a sense. Yes, it identifies what is mine and what is not.

B. Well, I don't think it is so easy to tell what is one's own and what is not.

R. Oh, that's easy. I have power over what is mine—like my own bank-account. I can do what I like with it.

B. I see that you have a bandaged finger. Show me how much power you have over it by healing it instantly!

R. Can't do that, you know. It's not natural!

B. Well now, what is natural? And does power over a thing signify ownership? For instance, that bit of dead wood over there. Is it myself?

R. Oh, come on… of course not!

B. But it's quite natural, and one can do nothing about making it live again. When it lived, that life was conditioned by many factors, now it's dead because of those factors' change. Yet you say "my body"!

T. It is mine! It has belonged to me since I was born!

B. Righto! Then "your" body, which you can't heal—at least you know when it is going to die?

R. No… (faltering) I've no idea… but…

B. But it's your body, and you can't cure it, can't stop it getting old, can't stop it dying, you don't even know when that body's going to die. But still it's your body. How much yours?

(Silence)

B. And who is the owner anyway?

(Silence)

72 ~ Not Yours

"This body, bhikkhus, is not yours nor is it others'. It should be seen as produced by past kamma, volitions, and feelings. Regarding this, the learned noble disciple thoroughly and systematically attends to dependent origination: This being, that is; from the arising of this, that arises; this not being, that is not; from the cessation of this, that ceases. That is to say: Unknowing conditions kamma-formations…"

—S. II. 37

73

The brain proclaimed: "I'm the boss here. Get up instantly, lazy bones!"

Groans from the bones: "I'm broken! I'm smashed! Who are you ordering around anyway? Yeah, who is *he*? Garn! We boss the lot, unless we are whole the contraption can't stand!"

Outcry from the tendons: "You bones'll stand up by yourselves, will yer? Won't do without us! Just fall to bits, a right skelington!"

A howl from the heart: "What are you all quarreling about? No one gets anywhere without me, Old Brain least of all!"

A grunt from the guts: "Now don't you get superior, heart! Where you goin-a-be without us workers sending you food?"

Clamor from the kidneys: "Fine mess you'll be in without us!"

Loud laugh from the lungs: " 'Ere, wotcha gonna do without us twin windbags? Won't get very far, will yer?"

Shriek from the skin: "Shudup the lot of you! I wrap you all up so that you don't look like a butcher's shop!"

And so the debate went on but no master could be found.

74 ~ Holes and holiness

Unfillable hole
this whole body
look at it—hollow
holes for food in
and holes for muck out
holes for air both in and out
down to hollow lungs,
below is a hole of a belly
and yards of hollow tubes
a big hole of a bladder
holes everywhere;
some senses lurk in hollows—
eye-holes, ear-holes too,
the tongue in its hollow mouth
the air-holes holding smell;
one great big hole, hollow
the whole of this body
wholly empty
wholly void
all holes
wholly insubstantial
hollow..........hollow
the way to holiness.

75

We take a bag to go shopping, and it gets filled up with what we want, if we pay the price.

In the same way this skin bag gets filled up, according to our desires. And we pay the price: old age and death.

76 ~ The Discourses on the Arrow

The Buddha:

Here life's for mortals, wretched and brief, unknown its end; incalculable and 'tis to dukkha joined.

That those who are born will never die no means are there indeed!

Having reached decay there's death, thus is the law for beings.

As for fruit that is ripe there's always fear of falling so for mortals who are born there's always fear of death.

Just as vessels made of clay by a maker of pots all end by being broken, so death is (the end) of life.

The young and those who're great in age, the fools together with the wise, all go under the sway of death, for all death is the goal.

Those who are overcome by death and going to another world, the father cannot protect his son, nor relatives their kin.

While relatives are watching, weeping and lamenting, see mortal beings one by one led as an ox to slaughter.

As the world is thus afflicted by death and by decay, therefore the wise grieve not knowing the nature of the world.

Their path you do not know by which they come, by which they go.

Neither end is seen by you, useless your lament!

If then by lamenting benefits were obtained then the wise would do so, a fool just hurts himself.

Not by crying nor by grief the mind attains to peace but still more dukkha is produced, the body as well is harmed.

One becomes both pale and thin—one merely hurts oneself, not thus are the dead protected, it's useless to lament!

By not forsaking grief one goes to greater dukkha, bewailing those who've died, one's in the sway of grief.

See other men who go along, go according to kamma, so beings tremble here with fear come under the sway of death.

However they conceive it, it's quite other than that, just so is separation—see the nature of the world!

Though one lived for hundred years or even more, such a man is separated from his kin and here he leaves his life.

So having heard the arahats, give up your lamentation.

Seeing the corpse (one should think): "He'll not be met by me again."

As a burning house with water should be extinguished,[17] so one wise and steadfast, a man who's wise in wholesomeness quickly is rid of arisen grief as wind a tuft of down.

One who desires his own happiness: let him pull out his own arrow—lamentations and longings, the grief that's in himself.

Arrow withdrawn, unattached, the mind attains to peace, passed beyond all grief, griefless and extinguished.

—Salla Suttas, Sutta-nipāta, verses 574-593

77 ~ The Discourse on Old Age.[18]

The Buddha:

Short indeed is this life—
within a hundred years one dies,
and if anyone lives longer
then he dies of decay.

People grieve for what is "mine":
indeed possessions are not permanent
and this is subject to destruction—
see this and homeless dwell!

In death it is abandoned
yet man thinks "it is mine."
Knowing this, the wise man devoted to me
should not stoop down to making "his own."

As a man awake sees not
the things he met in sleep,
so too the one beloved is not seen
having departed and done his time.

People now are seen and heard
and thus are called by name,
but alone shall the name remain
for the departed to be spoken of.

The greedy in "mine"-making do not give up
sorrow, lamentation, avarice
therefore sages leaving possessions
have wandered about, Seers of the Secure.

For a bhikkhu practicing seclusion,
keeping company with the secluded mind,
all are agreed and say of him
"He should not show himself again in becoming!"

The sage is unsupported in all circumstances,
nothing he makes dear nor what is not dear,
sorrow and avarice stain him not,
just as water stays not upon a leaf.

As a water-drop upon a lotus plant,
as water does not stain a lotus flower,
even so the sage is never stained
by what has been seen, heard, and sensed by him.

Certainly the wise man does not conceive
by what has been seen, heard and sensed,
nor through another does he wish for purity
for he is not attached nor yet is he displeased.

—Jarā Sutta, Sutta-nipāta, verses 804-813

78 ~ Contemplation of Death

Uncertain is life:
Certain is death.
Inevitable is death for me.
My life has death at its end.

Life is indeed unsure,
But death is sure,
Death is sure.

—From the Dhammapada commentary story
of the Weavers' daughter

79

"As soon as evening comes, or when the night vanishes and day is breaking, a bhikkhu reflects in this way: "Truly there are many possibilities for me to die—I may be bitten by a snake, or stung by scorpion or centipede—and thereby lose my life. But this would be an obstacle for me. Or I may stumble and fall down, or food eaten may not agree with me. Or bile, phlegm, and piercing bodily "winds" may upset me—and thereby I may lose my life. Then men or ghosts may attack me—and thereby I may lose my life. But this would be an obstacle for me.' Then the bhikkhu should consider thus: 'Are there still found in me unsubdued evil unwholesome factors which, if I should die this day or night, might lead me to dukkha?' Now, if he understands that this is the case, he should use his utmost resolution, energy, effort, endeavor, steadfastness, attentiveness, and clear-mindedness to overcome these evil unwholesome factors."

—A. VIII. 74, trans. after Ven. Nyanatiloka
in *Buddhist Dictionary*, P.98

80 ~ The Arahat Ratthapala Thera's Verses Addressed To The Aged King Koravya

I see men wealthy in the world, who yet
Give not, from ignorance, their gatheren riches;
But greedily will hoard away their wealth,
Through longing for still further sensual pleasures.

A king who has by force conquered the earth
And even lords the land the ocean bounds
Is yet unsated with the sea's near shore
And hungers for its further shore as well.

Most men as well, not just a king,
Encounter death with craving unabated;
With plans still incomplete they leave the corpse;
Desires remain unsated in the world.

His relatives lament him, rend their hair,
Crying "Ah me! Alas! Our love is dead!"
Then bear away the body wrapped in shrouds
To place it on a pyre and burn it there

Clad in a single shroud, he leaves behind
His property, and prodded with stakes he burns,
And as he died, no relative or kin
Or friends could offer refuge to him here.

The while his heirs annex his wealth, this being
Must now pass on according to his kammas;
And as he dies no thing can follow him:
Nor child nor wife nor wealth nor royal estate.

Longevity is not acquired with wealth
Nor can prosperity banish old age;
Short is this life, as all the sages say,
Eternity it knows not, only change.

The rich man and the poor man both shall feel
(Death's) touch, as do the fool and sage alike;
But while the fool lies stricken by his folly,
No sage will ever tremble at the touch.

Better is understanding, then, whereby
The goal can here be gained, than any wealth;
For men through different lives in ignorance
Do evil, while they fail to reach the goal.

As one goes to the womb and the next world,
Renewing the successive round, so another
With no more understanding, trusting him,
Goes also to the womb and the next world.

Just as robber caught in burglary
By his own kamma's marked a miscreant,
So people after death, in the next world
By their own kammas marked are they as miscreants.

For sense-desires so mind-alluring, sweet.
In many a different way disturb the mind;
Seeing the danger in these sense-desires
So I went forth to homelessness, O king.

—From Middle Length Discourses No. 82,
trans. Ven. Ñāṇamoli Thera

81

"Short indeed is this life of men, limited, fleeting, full of woe and torment; it is just like a dewdrop that vanishes as soon as the sun rises; like a water-bubble; like a line drawn on water; like a torrent dragging everything along and never standing still; like cattle for slaughter that every moment look death in the face."

—A. VII. 70, condensed trans. after Ven. Nyanatiloka
in *Buddhist Dictionary*, p.99

82

If "I" am dying when this Bag of Bones packs up, then the pain is terrible indeed; but if it's just this bag of bones packing up………then?

83

A. What's going to die?

B. I am going to die!

A. Nonsense!

B. What do you mean?

A. The body is going to die. It's only you dying if you identify the body as yourself.

B. That's a good thought. Then I am not going to die. I shall live for ever!

A. Can do, if that's what you want! But think of the sufferings, born and dying, again and again.

B. How do I get out of it?

A. Just as you don't identify with the body, so you try not identifying with the mind.

B. Wow! How come! Impossible! *I* don't identify with *my* mind. There's only one *me*.

A. Suppose you see no *me*, suppose there is just emptiness, and no *me* perceiving it, what then?

B. Oh!

84

Interesting that religions (all of them) concern themselves so much with the dead *bodies.* Ceremonies of various sorts are all conducted round the lifeless lumps of decaying flesh. Yet each religion is concerned really with whatever is thought of as continuing. It shows that attachment to *the body as the person* is very strong.

And in English we talk of "the dead" as opposed to "the living." But for a Buddhist there are no dead people, only decaying bodies. Paradoxically, a person, while not rid of the concept of personality, never dies.

85

Villagers in Buddhist countries are often better schooled in the body and its end than are educated Westerners. The former have plenty of chances to go to the local temple, or to see the nearest meditation teacher. And what do they hear? Again and again they hear the sound of ANICCA, DUKKHA, ANATTA[19] of all parts of the human being, mind and body. By hearing frequently it sinks in, so that even if people never penetrate these Three Marks of Existence in themselves, at least they have an attitude of accepting them to some extent. It helps with decay, disease, and death. And they see friends and kin cremated, not in a posh chapel with soft music, solemn colors and concealed oven, but on top of a pile of logs in the forest. That's the body burning—there's that smell of meat…and this body too will go the same way.

These things are good to see. They are healthy, wholesome. There is no false solemnity, things are just the way they are. Undisguised.

86

People in Buddhist lands who have so often heard teaching about ANICCA, impermanence, are more ready to accept the common end than a great many Westerners. Old age, disease and death are better accepted by Buddhists as just as natural a part of life as birth. One does not bewail the birth of a child—though painful enough for both mother and child—so why bewail the naturally succeeding events? Buddhists who know the Dhamma well talk naturally and calmly about their old age and death as they have contemplated as ANICCA everything in this (and any other) world.

87

There is nothing like living in a little hut in the tropical forest to make one realize how vulnerable this body is to all sorts of attack. How very small creatures can make life difficult if not precarious for this body. A city-dweller misses most of this and may easily get a false sense of security. (All those neat little suburban houses in regular rows…)

Another thing which life in the wilds makes really necessary is mindfulness. Mindfulness where one puts one's feet, specially in the dark. And then one cannot get on without loving-kindness too, since all sorts of other beings are so near to oneself, near to this body which one fears for. Loving-kindness rids one of such fears and hatreds.

88

We have so many fears—all things out there—ghosts, darkness, unknown people, loneliness, and so on. The really fearful things, this mind-and-body's precarious state, we never see.

89

The body has a side which most of us don't want to see and know. We wish to hush up its dirt, stinks, belches, and farts, to disregard and overlook them. Yet finally when laid low and near to death, these stenches and filths can be disguised no longer.

90

It is a salutary lesson, if one gets the chance, to go to an autopsy and watch the doctors and nurses pulling a body to pieces. One's eyes are not prepared for this sight even if one has watched a butcher chopping up meat. And one's nose can well be assaulted too by the overpowering stench of decay if the corpse is just a few days old. To see this is to experience for oneself some Dhamma: how the body is just conditioned and decaying bits and pieces. "As this body is, so that body was; as that body is, so this body will be."

91

Lists like the following ten stages of the body's decay are often illustrated in traditional Buddhist art, in ancient books and on temple walls, as often seen in Thailand. These are like special prescriptions for the disease of lust:

- a bloated corpse (cures attachment to shapeliness)
- a discolored corpse (cures attachment to color and complexion)
- a festering corpse (cures attachment to bodily smell and fine perfumes)
- a gnawn-by-animals corpse (cures attachment to greed for fleshy protuberances)
- a scattered corpse (cures attachment to gracefulness of limbs)
- a bleeding corpse (cures attachment to decoration of the body with ornaments)
- a worm-infested corpse (cures attachment to body as one's own)
- a skeleton held together by sinews (cures attachment to fine bone structure)
- scattered bones (cures attachment to body as "one thing")
- rotting and powdered bones (cures attachment to the body as permanent)

92 ~ This Body…

This body lying in decay
To worms and flies unconscious prey,
Bereft of mind and animation
Portrays man’s final situation.

Engendered in a human womb,
A fabric wrought upon the loom
Of sensual lust and will-to-be,
It grew in stature like a tree,
But mind-informed, with fresh desires
Raging within like hungry fires,
Fed by the senses’ ample fuel
In an eternal self-renewal.

Self-renewed and self-consumed,
A turbulence forever doomed
To futile striving, hopes and fears,
Alternating through the years:
Childhood, youth, maturity,
Seeking in vain security,
Seeking in vain to quench the fire
By satisfaction of desire.

And day by day with every breath,
Every heart-beat a little death,
Stole from the body’s falling source
A fraction of its vital force.
The body undermined by stealth,
Then knew the pangs of failing health.

—Francis Story, from *The Buddhist Outlook*

93 ~ Verses of the Arahat Kulla Thera on seeing a corpse

Having gone to the charnel-ground
I saw cast there a woman's corpse,
discarded in the cemetery,
being gnawn and full of worms.
A rotten congeries, Kulla, see—
diseased it is, impure,
oozing and trickling here and there
wherein fools find delight.
This body I inspected—
inane within and without—
taking the Dhamma's looking-glass
to Knowing and Seeing attained.
As this body is, so that body was;
as that body is, so will this body be.
As foul it is above so foul it is below,
and as it is above so it is below.
As it is by day, so it is by night;
as night, so day the same.
There's no such pleasure even from
a quintet's music as there is
from rightly Dhamma seeing
with singleness mind.

—Verses of the Elders Bhikkhus, 393-398

The "Knowing and Seeing"—insight (*vipassanā*)—that this thera saw in himself is first:

Seeing no difference between the living and the dead bodies—only time makes a difference.

Then seeing the dead body as totally foul—not attracted to this (=greed) or repelled by that (=hatred), and applying this to his own body.

Then seeing that all the time, day or night, the body has the same qualities—not that it is desirable at some times but not at others.

The enjoyments that most get from sense-pleasures—here the example of a quintet is given—this thera has found far more abundantly in seeing Dhamma rightly.

94

Spiritual objector:

"All this pondering over corpses and looking into the body's parts is just morbid. One should look at the body as a pure temple of the spirit."

Practical Upasaka:[20]

"It goes against the grain to gaze at the bits and pieces in this body and see that they have nothing attractive about them. But this way lies Liberation. To glorify the body is to be bound by craving for it."

95

Doctor:

I cannot understand you when you say that the body is unbeautiful; to me it is such a wonderful machine!

Bhikkhu:

The trouble with that view of the "wonderfulness of the body" is that it is near delight (*nandi*) and delighting in the body is another name for craving, the root of dukkha. Seeing the body's unattractiveness is opposed to craving.

96

"You're wrong, man, sex is just natural, like breathing—just something you've got to do. Just like eating. It's a beautiful natural function!"

"Not true! Your comparisons are not apt."

"How come? You mean it's not natural?"

"Yes, sex is natural for people with desire, that means sex-desire or lust, in their hearts. But lust is a hindrance to the development of mental-emotional purity. But your comparisons to breathing and eating don't stand examination. Breathing is an automatic body function. No kamma, good or bad, is made because no intention is needed to decide to breathe!

"Eating is different because, though necessary for the body's life, it is connected with intention, so kamma is made. When greed for food is present, bad kamma is made which will fruit as suffering. But when food is eaten mindfully and just to keep the body going, then good kamma is made—of mindful reflection.

"Sex is different from both these. No sex takes place without desire or lust: this is among the unwholesome mental factors—it can never be karmically wholesome—so unwholesome kamma is made which has the nature to limit the mind to sensual things."

"That's painting sex too black!"

"No, that's being realistic. Of course, states of mind will vary while one has sex—more or less lust and more or less of loving-kindness. More lust (as when sex is commercial) means more bad kamma. More loving-kindness, as between two people deeply attached to each other, less bad kamma and more good kamma. In the latter case it is called kamma which is dark and bright, with a dark and bright result."

97 ~ A Manichee and a Buddhist

M. It's all the work of Satan—this foul body. We agree with you Buddhists about that.

B. Well, the body is certainly not pleasant when examined, but we do not say that it has been created, by Satan.

M. But all matter is evil, foul, dragging the soul into darkness, as our Mani says.

B. That's not what the Buddha says, though. Matter is just earth, water, fire, and air elements which are quite neutral, neither good nor evil. They form bodies due to kamma made by beings; good or evil kammas both lead to the formation of bodies.

M. You must admit, though, that your body is a hindrance to the attainment of spiritual states. You have to feed it and rest it, dose it with medicine when it gets sick. Because of its wretchedness the soul is weighed down.

B. No, I do not admit that. The body is the basis and vehicle for practice so one should take care of it without pampering it. Though it has to eat, sleep, excrete, and gets sick too, at these times we should be mindful, which is possible at all times when not asleep. Even the difficulties of the body can be used in Dhamma-practice. And what is this about a soul being weighed down?

M. Well, that is the pure aspirations, the pure thoughts, the still states of contemplation—that is the beginning of discovering the soul.

B. Oh, then the impure aspirations, thoughts and confused states of mind must be not soul! You should investigate all mental states, pure and impure, calm and distracted, and find out whether any of them are substantial or permanent. What would you find, do you think?

M. All right, they're changing. But behind them all is the pure tranquil soul, eternally unchanging.

B. But have you experienced this or are you just telling me some dogma or belief?

M. Yes, I think I have experienced it. Then one is free from the trammels of this body.

B. Really you need to examine all mental states, as I mentioned before, and the body too, in the same light. They're all Anicca, Dukkha, Anattā…

M. What…?

B. Sorry! I get so used to using those words that they have slipped off my tongue, unmindfully I am afraid! They mean impermanent, unsatisfactory, and no self. When you look at them like this you neither love the soul nor hate the body. That is, put in a Buddhist way, you don't cling to pure tranquility and identify it as your soul or self, neither do you reject this body. Don't lay the blame on this poor old body! It's not to blame.

M. But Mani says that it is.

B. Well then, I shall ask you a question. What makes decisions and choices, is it the body or the mind?

M. The mind decides, of course.

B. Then how can the body be blamed? It is not evil, nor is matter darkness. Poor old body just gets dragged along by the decisions the mind makes.

M. But you Buddhists practice contemplation of the body as foul. I have read about it.

B. Yes, but that does not mean it is evil. That kind of meditation is just to break up the attachment to the beauty of bodies. It is the attachment in one's own mind, not any Satan or evil creator, that is responsible for keeping the mind tied down to sensual pleasures. Look inside for the evil creator—his name is attachment, greed, desire, lust—and he is put out of business by contemplating the unattractive. The good creator is in there too, the mind that creates pure mental states, the experience of jhāna and so on. But all this creating keeps one in the round of rebirth, you know!

98

A. Hey, man! Why you cut your hair and beard? Hair's natural to have but you monks cut it off. We should keep it; it's natural, it's beautiful.

Bhikkhu: It's cut off for two reasons. First, it decorates this body. You people like decoration. That's what lay life is all about. But bhikkhus like the body plain, without distractions, so that they can see what it's really like.

A. Well, what's it really like?

B. If you like it as it is, "naturally," you should try not washing, not brushing the teeth or cleaning the nails, not combing the hair—and so on. Body and its parts are only beautiful if washing is also "natural."

A. So, you said that hair decorates, what's your other reason?

B. It's a disguise, that beard and moustache—it's something to hide behind, a mask. When you have no hair on the head and face you have no mask behind which to retire. Is it natural or beautiful to hide things? Isn't it better to open up? Who solves problems by hiding them away? Shaving hair and beard is also an outer token of the shaving off of conceit and pride which has to be done steadily and carefully over years of practice.

99 ~ Futility

Mad for pleasure
for fleeting pleasant feelings
clinging to impermanence.

two pulsing bags
clinging together
how pitiful!

clinging to what can't be clung
clinging to changefulness
a fistful of water.

few moments of happiness
found in sex
for which the world is mad.

he burns, on fire inside
for another,
how come he feels no pain?

pain to be assuaged
so he supposes
by making two fires one.

one fire is not enough,
when with another joined
how much more scorching?

scorched and aflame
beings run
from on fire to another.

another fire, another,
as though the fire
by fire could be extinguished.

extinguished, fire gone out
cool peace
no one wants it.

stoke up the furnaces
pile high the blaze
the world’s way.

ways to hells and animals
furious fires of desire
burning endlessly.

why do we never tire
of being burnt?
“Hot but sweet” they say.

pleasure like a leper’s
picking his scabs
a small relief from pain.

pain, painfulness
how pain-filled indeed
entire Saṃsāra—

filled with pleasure-loving beings
not wanting pain
whose pleasures drive to Dukkha.

100 ~ The Silent Shrine

Where silence reigns the Buddha sits,
He dwells alone, the only face
Has He that one should ever look upon
Deep within the shrine that always is,
The center of this house—
Where is it found?
Flesh the walls and bones the beams
With windows five to look upon the world,
While wandering, a witless idiot
Roams through the empty rooms;
How slow is he to come upon that shrine,
How faltering his steps unsure!
Distractedly, confused
He fumbles for the door—
Hinges rusty, locked for long, unused,
Swollen wood and jammed the door decayed.
When will he look, this witless one,
When will he see the ancient face of peace?
When will he worship at the shrine?
When will he know the Way and Fruit?
When will he find the silence?
Where the Buddha sits?

Notes

1. Or "habit of following the body, being dependent on the body."

2. The Truth-speaker (who speaks the truth of impermanence) is the Buddha.

3. Many verses in Chapter VIII of that work are certainly "sick."

4. (Two) eyes, (two) ears, (two) nostrils, mouth, urinary duct, and anus.

5. Pali: *nibbindatha.* This can also be rendered "be weary of" or "be averse to" or "be disgusted with." But none of these renderings conveys the flavor of very subtle Dhamma-practice; they are too gross and convey negative or defiled states of mind. We should note that the Buddha is speaking to monks—that is, to those who practice Dhamma full-time, and if we knew the circumstances in which these words were spoken, we should probably find that the monks addressed needed such a "severe" exhortation in order to overcome greed or attachment.

6. "Worms" means not only the parasitic worms, but all the other parasites, visible or of microscopic size, which make this body their home.

7. Disciples, literally "listeners."

8. As "me" or "mine."

9. Abandon attachment to it.

10. Why is the body called "Māra's partisan" (lit: on the side of Māra)? Because the body is subject to all sorts of pain, dismemberment, death, as well as unwholesome desires connected with the body—such as to overeat or for sex, which are obstacles to purity of mind, riddance of defilements, and enlightenment.

11. Women reading this must substitute "a man's form."

12. This thera's name means "all desires."

13. Suffering of all kinds, physical and mental, and suffering due to the impermanence of everything.

14. Go in by the mouth but can come out from the eyes (2), ears (2), nostrils (2), mouth, urinary duct, and anus, as various sorts of "dirt."

15. The Thai *bubbulūpamā* is translated "a wave compared," a wave being a very suitable simile for feeling.

16. A banana-plant.

17. "Extinguished": for the putting out of the flames of greed, aversion and delusion (= Arahatship) the same verb is used, as in the last line of the verses.

18. Or on "Aging" or "Decay."

19. Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness, No-self.

20. A Buddhist layman keeping five or eight precepts.

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